

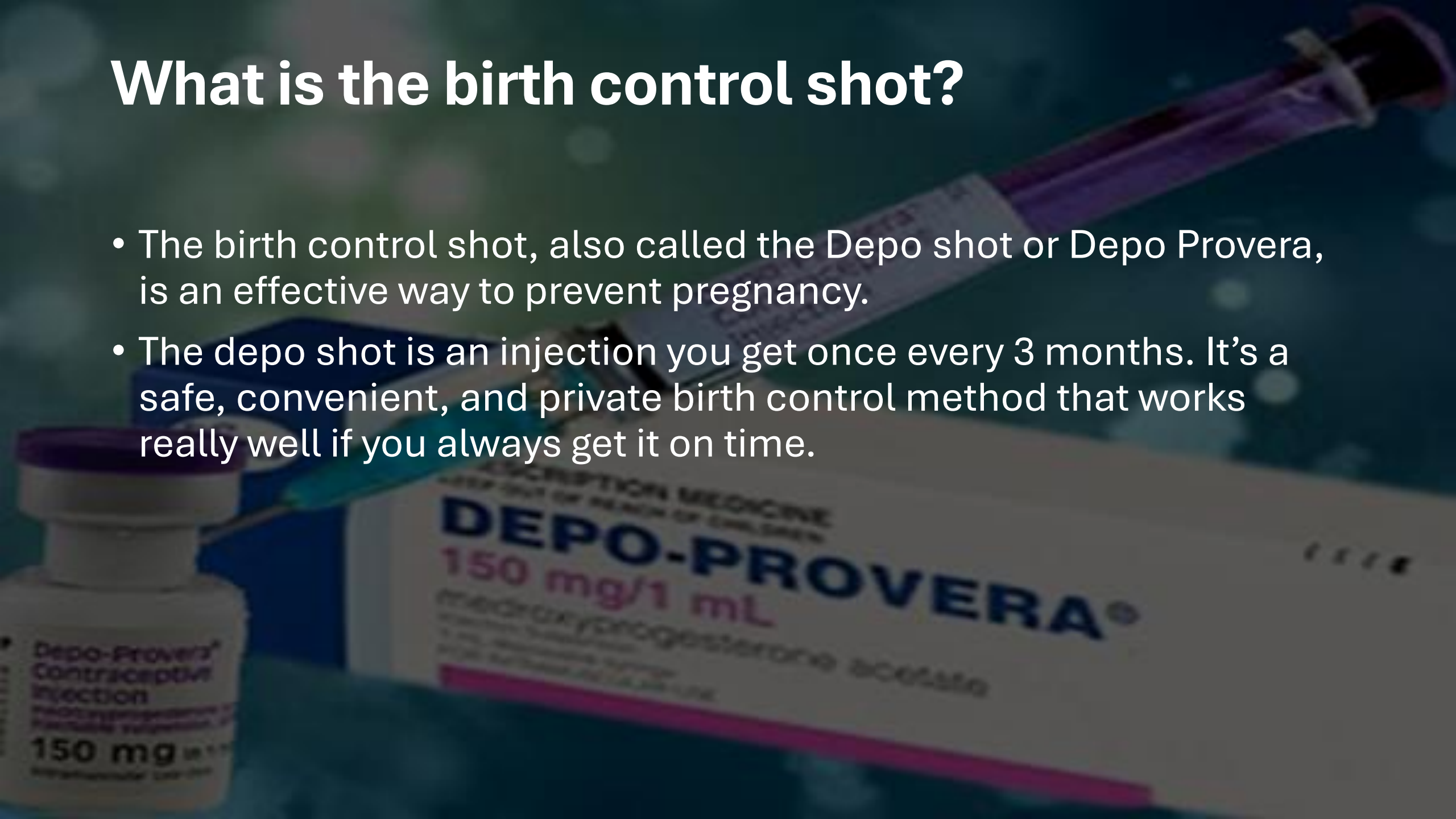
A hand holding a syringe next to a person's arm with a rolled-up sleeve. The background is a solid light gray. The syringe is held horizontally, with the needle pointing left. The person's arm is on the left, with a light blue sleeve rolled up to the elbow. The hand holding the syringe is on the right.

Preventing pregnancy

By: Nicole Haines

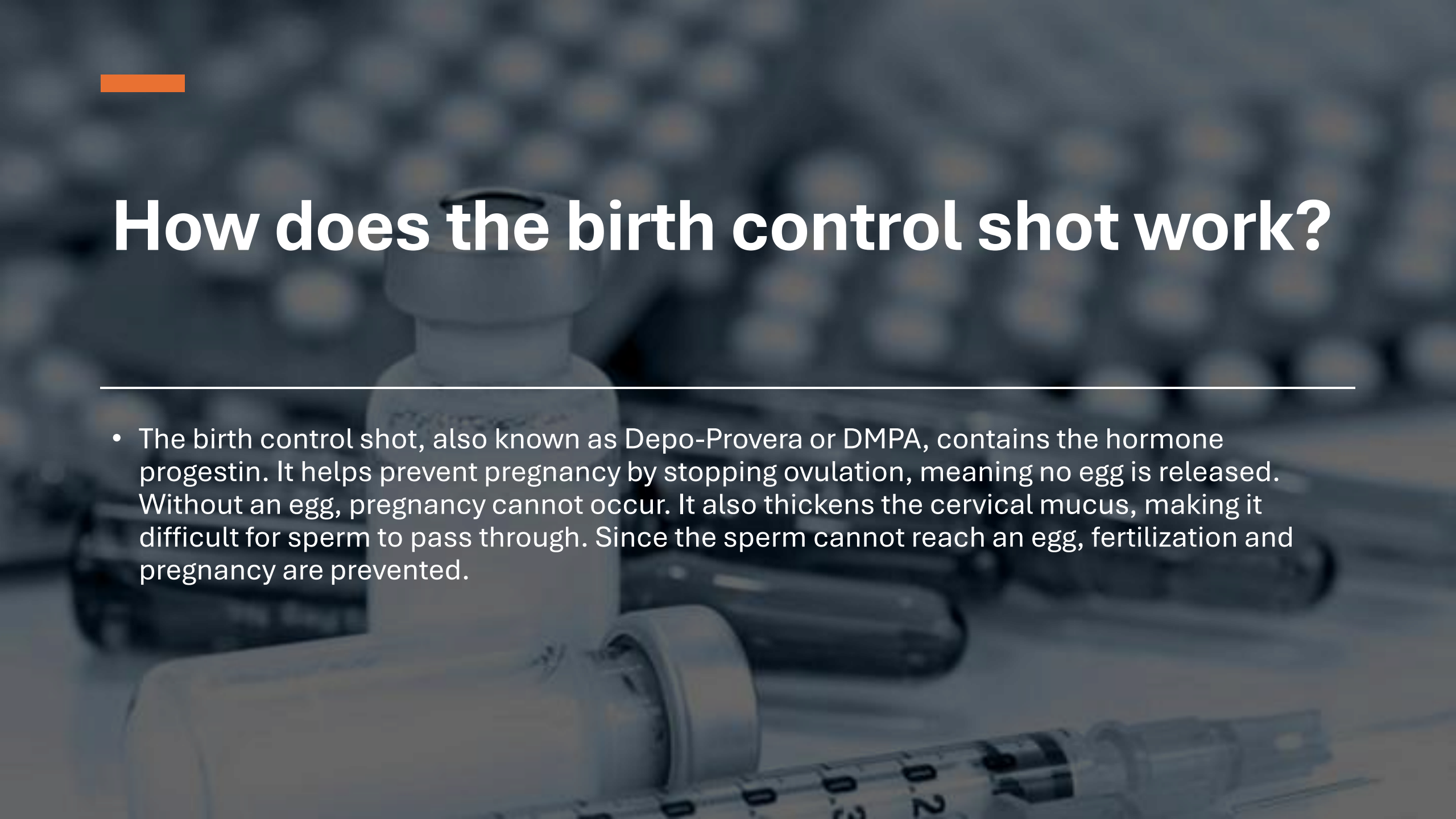
What is the birth control shot?

- The birth control shot, also called the Depo shot or Depo Provera, is an effective way to prevent pregnancy.
- The depo shot is an injection you get once every 3 months. It's a safe, convenient, and private birth control method that works really well if you always get it on time.





How does the birth control shot work?

- The birth control shot, also known as Depo-Provera or DMPA, contains the hormone progestin. It helps prevent pregnancy by stopping ovulation, meaning no egg is released. Without an egg, pregnancy cannot occur. It also thickens the cervical mucus, making it difficult for sperm to pass through. Since the sperm cannot reach an egg, fertilization and pregnancy are prevented.
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Does the shot protect against STDs?



- No, the shot is very effective at preventing pregnancy, but it does not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- Using condoms every time you have sex greatly reduces the risk of getting or spreading STIs. An added benefit is that condoms also help prevent pregnancy, so using them along with the shot provides even stronger protection against pregnancy.

How can you prevent STDs?



Use condoms every time



Get vaccinated



Avoid sharing needles



Get tested regularly



Have fewer partners



Talk openly with partners



Consult a doctor

How effective is the birth control shot?

When used exactly as directed, the birth control shot is over 99% effective, meaning fewer than 1 in 100 people will become pregnant each year. In real life, it's about 96% effective because some people don't get their shots on schedule. This means around 4 out of 100 users may become pregnant each year.



The more consistent you are with getting your shot on time, the more effective it will be. However, there is still a very small chance of pregnancy, even with perfect use.



If effectiveness is your top priority, you may want to consider options like IUDs or the implant, which are the most effective forms of birth control. But if you choose the shot, it's important to stay on schedule with your follow-up injections.

What birth control shot side effects should I expect?

- The hormones in the birth control shot can cause side effects for some people, but not everyone experiences them—many use it without any issues.
- The most common side effects involve changes in your menstrual cycle, especially during the first year. These may include:
 - Longer periods than usual
 - Spotting or light bleeding between periods
 - No period at all
 - About half of people stop having periods while using the shot, and this is completely safe.
- Other possible side effects can include:
 - Nausea
 - Weight gain
 - Headaches
 - Breast tenderness
 - Mood changes or depression
 - Mild bruising at the injection site
 - A small, permanent dent in the skin at the injection site (rare)
- Most side effects improve within 2–3 months as your body adjusts to the hormones.
- If you don't feel well on the shot, talk to a healthcare provider. They can help you explore other birth control options—many people try a few before finding the best fit. Keep in mind that if you stop the shot and don't use another method, pregnancy can happen quickly.
- The hormones in the shot have been used safely for many years by millions of people. While there are some risks (as with any medication), serious problems are uncommon. If you have concerns, you should reach out to a healthcare provider.

Positive effects

- Not all side effects are negative—some can actually be helpful. The shot may:
- Reduce heavy or painful periods
- Decrease cramps and PMS symptoms
- Make periods lighter or stop them altogether
- It is safe to not have a period while using the shot. Sometimes this can cause concern about pregnancy, but as long as injections are received on time every 3 months, the risk is very low. A pregnancy test can always provide reassurance if needed.
- The shot may also offer protection against certain conditions, such as uterine cancer and iron-deficiency anemia.

How much does the birth control shot cost?

- The birth control shot can cost anywhere from **\$0 to \$150**, depending on your situation. The good news is that many health insurance plans and government programs can cover the cost, making it free or low-cost for a lot of people.
- The exact price depends on factors like where you live, whether you have insurance, and if you qualify for financial assistance programs. Your first visit may include an exam, which can cost between **\$0 and \$250**. After that, each follow-up shot visit typically ranges from **\$0 to \$150**.
- Most insurance plans are required to cover birth control-related visits, and many people can get the shot at no cost through their insurance. If you're unsure, your insurance provider or doctor can help you understand your coverage.
- If you don't have insurance, you still have options. You may qualify for state or local programs that help cover the cost of birth control. Health centers, including Planned Parenthood, often accept insurance and can also help you find affordable payment options based on your income and situation.



What are the disadvantages of the birth control shot?

- You need to get the birth control shot every 3 months for it to work properly. This usually means visiting a doctor's office or health center, although some people may be able to take doses home and give the injection themselves. No matter the method, staying on schedule is very important. Setting reminders or using an app can help you keep track of when your next shot is due.
- If it's hard for you to make regular appointments or keep up with the schedule, you may want to consider other birth control options. Methods like IUDs or implants don't require ongoing attention once they're placed.
- Like any medication, the shot can cause side effects, although many people adjust without problems. Common changes include differences in your menstrual cycle, especially during the first year. You may experience longer periods, spotting between periods, or no period at all. Other possible side effects include nausea, weight gain, headaches, breast tenderness, mood changes, and mild bruising at the injection site. In rare cases, a small dent in the skin may occur. Most side effects improve after a few months as your body adjusts.
- Many people eventually stop having periods after using the shot for about a year. This is normal and safe, and your cycle should return to normal a few months after stopping the shot.
- If the shot causes side effects that bother you, talk to your healthcare provider about other birth control options. There are many choices available, and you can find one that works best for you.
- After stopping the shot, it may take some time for your fertility to return. Although the shot stops working about 15 weeks after your last dose, it can take up to 10 months, or sometimes longer, for ovulation and regular cycles to return. Everyone's body is different, so timing can vary. Your period may take a few months to come back, and it's possible to become pregnant before your first period returns. If you don't want to get pregnant after stopping the shot, be sure to use another form of birth control.

Conclusion

- The birth control shot is a safe and effective option for preventing pregnancy when used correctly and on schedule. While it may cause some side effects, many people adjust well and even experience benefits like lighter or no periods. It's important to choose a birth control method that fits your lifestyle and to talk with a healthcare provider about any concerns. Remember, using condoms along with the shot can provide extra protection by helping prevent sexually transmitted infections.